HELP ?

The Lexus and the Olive Tree

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Abstract:
Cerami reviews "The Lexus and the Olive Tree" by Thomas L. Friedman.

Full Text:

The Lexus and the Olive Tree. By Thomas L. Friedman. New York: Farrar, Straws; and Giroux, 1999. 394 pages. $27.50. Reviewed by Colonel Joseph R. Cerami, Chairman, Department of National Security and Strategy, US Army War College.

Journalist Thomas Friedman has been the foreign affairs columnist for The New York Times since 1994. Reduced to one sentence, his best-selling book is about the new era of globalization: "Globalization as the one big thing-a systemic, worldwide shaping force." Friedman provides a guidebook to explain the tensions between the new paradigm of "globalization" and the "old power politics/Cold War" model. He also provides his thoughts about the US role in managing these new forces shaping domestic politics and international relations. Friedman's book extends and criticizes other major commentators' writings on the emerging international environment: Fukuyama (end of history), Kaplan (coming anarchy), and Huntington (clash of civilizations). In Friedman's view, all three underestimate the continuation of the state's power, the importance of global markets, the extent of technological diffusion, the rise of networks, and the spread of global norms. Friedman views globalization as an inexorable integration of the nationstate, markets, and technology to a degree not witnessed before in history.

Friedman bases his analysis on insights and wisdom gained from his personal and professional journey. This journey has taught him to be what he calls "a 6-D reporter," understanding the connections between politics, culture, nation-state, finance, technology, and the environment. His approach draws on two overarching frameworks: grand strategy and systems thinking. He writes of the importance of grand strategy, quoting from Paul Kennedy and John Lewis Gaddis's essay on educating the next generation of American strategists in a broad-based curriculum: "The dominant trend within universities and think tanks is toward ever-narrowing specialization: a higher premium is placed on functioning deeply within a single field than broadly across several. And yet without some awareness of the whole-without some sense of how means converge to accomplish or to frustrate ends-there can be no strategy. And without strategy there is only drift."

Using his 6-D perspective, Friedman describes several of the key causes of continuing conflict and instability in inter- and infra-state relations. He writes that world affairs today can be viewed essentially as the interaction of the old (the olive tree) and the new (the Lexus). The olive tree represents what roots and characterizes us in terms of individual and communal identity (family, community, tribe, nation, religion, homeland). The Lexus represents the drive for material betterment (sustenance, improvement, prosperity, modernization). "The challenge in this era of globalization-for countries and individuals-is to find a healthy balance between preserving a sense of identity, home, and community, and doing what it takes to survive within the globalization system."

The author devotes several chapters to report in detail on the emerging forces and trends shaping the international environment. As a self-described "tourist with an attitude," Friedman invents some catchy titles to describe them: the golden straitjacket (free-market economics as the only ideological alternative); the electronic herd (information-age stock and bond traders); DOScapital (imperatives for nation-states to develop free markets, macroeconomic policy, and rule of law to enable long-term governance); globalution (the herd's forcing the "wisest" leaders to develop their governing capacities through transparency, less corruption, a free press, and democratization). He even goes on to prescribe the "eight habits of highly effective countries."

From a security perspective, Friedman elaborates on his column regarding the Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention: "No two countries that both had a McDonald's had fought a war against each other since each got its McDonald's." He asks a key question: "To what degree does a country, by plugging itself into today's Electronic Herd and putting on the Golden Straitjacket, restrict the capacity for war-making by its leadership?" For answers he looks to several classics: from Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Law-that increased trade and commerce lead to peace; from Norman Angell, The Grand Illusion (1910)-that modern life and industrial economies lead to peace; and from Thucydides-that nations go to war for "honor, fear, and interest." In Friedman's view, Thucydides still rings true, but the costs are greater in the era of globalization. He concludes that "Globalization does not end geopolitics." Globalization increases constraints, and it raises incentives for not making war; it "increases the costs of going to war in more ways than in any previous era in modern history."

Friedman notes that the United States "excels in the traditional sources of [military] power" and possesses the "willingness to use that power against those who would threaten the system of globalization-from Iraq to North Korea." He continues: "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the US Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."

Friedman outlines the emergence of leadership from new "big-think strategists" such as Alan Greenspan and Robert Rubin, not from the Secretary of State or Defense. Strategic leadership, in Friedman's new era, requires a multidimensional global vision and structures to shape and stabilize international relations. The way to be effective as strategist is to move "back and forth among the economic, national security, political, cultural, environmental, and technological dimensions-assigning different weight to each in different contexts." If economics is to be the engine powering the United States and its allies into the next century, then it remains to be seen if the leaders of US economic institutions can take on the complex challenges and new roles and requirements for shaping international relations and synchronizing US policy in all dimensions.

Trying to describe and analyze current events and predict the shape of things to come is a tall order. Friedman

provides a provocative view in a book that should be read by policymakers and strategists. The Lexus and the Olive Tree provides an important perspective on the emergence of nontraditional forces and trends in the new century. For now, let's give him credit for naming the post-Cold War era. The roles of the United States in the world and of traditional Cold War security institutions and leaders continue to be reassessed. It remains for strategists to continue the debate and more clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the armed forces, our security structures, and leaders in the era of globalization.
